

It is truly a remarkable time of unprecedented participation for women in politics. Women are breaking barriers at a rate that Susan B. Anthony, a fellow Rochesteran and personal hero, could only dream of. As the first woman in history to chair the powerful Rules Committee in the House of Representatives, I am so proud to serve with Nancy Pelosi, the first woman Speaker. This is really quite a dramatic change from when I first ran for the Monroe County legislature in the 1970s. People may think they understand that running for office as a woman is not easy, but I don't think they realize just how hard it was back then. My campaign billboard was covered with black paint in protest to my candidacy. Constant harassing phone calls would wake my family in the middle of the night. One evening, my daughter answered the phone and heard someone say that I was "dead". Even the local League of Women Voters objected to me listing my membership simply because I was upending the status quo.

As a female candidate, traditional support was many times not available to me. The husbands who worked in corporate board rooms were not willing to fund my campaign like they had with others. My contributions came from the revenue of bake sales and selling cut glass and handmade crafts. I even received a card with a ten dollar bill stapled to it from a woman far away in Seattle. She said that she could only afford to give one contribution to a candidate and wanted to join my cause after hearing about my campaign.

In many ways, it was the difficulties I experienced that served as a great source of strength for me and hardened my determination. While I lost the first two elections, I won my third and every election since, all the way up to the House of Representatives, even unseating three entrenched incumbents and receiving strong support from women in both parties.

These obstacles prepared me to navigate the "old boys club" of politics and end up chairing one of the most powerful committees in Congress. No one could push me around because I knew where I came from and how hard I fought to get where I was.

It was this attitude that enabled me to be an effective advocate for Western New York in Congress. One of my proudest achievements is putting the Monroe County Airport on the Federal Aviation Administration priority list so that airlines would pay for it rather than county taxpayers. I am very proud of my work to renew the economy, securing funding for fuel cells and defense spending within the district, erecting the CIMS building at the Rochester Institute of Technology, and winning many awards for my work improving women's health and fighting breast cancer.

We need more women to lend themselves to run for public office because politics are far too important to just be left up to men. While challenges still exist, the harder you have to fight, the more adversity you know you can overcome and the more you know you can achieve. As Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "It's up to the women!"

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